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ABSTRACT

This is a selected, annotated bibliography of dictionaries useful to Indochinese refugees. The purpose of this guide is to provide the American teacher or sponsor with information on the use, limitations and availability of monolingual and bilingual dictionaries which can be used by refugees. The bibliography is preceded by notes on problems with bilingual dictionaries and on the process of choosing a dictionary. (Author/TL)

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Indochinese Refugee Education Guides

#9

GENERAL INFORMATION SERIES: A Selected Bibliography of Dictionaries

The Indochinese refugee, in trying to cope with his language problems in the United States, nearly always feels that what he needs most is a dictionary. The purpose of this bulletin is to provide the American teacher or sponsor with information on the use, limitations and availability of dictionaries which can be used by the refugee -- if not to solve all his language problems at once, at least to give him something to hold while he is solving them some other way.

The dictionaries in the annotated list below are either monolingual or bilingual. Monolingual dictionaries are those in which the words and their definitions are both in the same language. They are designed to be used by a native speaker of the language, and range from unabridged dictionaries, which aim at listing all the words in use in the language at the time of publication, to dictionaries with very limited scope, such as those written for preschool children.

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Bilingual dictionaries are those in which the words are listed in one language, but their definitions (as well as information on grammar and pronunciation) are given in another language. They are designed to be used by someone who is learning one or the other of the languages. A bilingual Vietnamese-English dictionary, for example, lists Vietnamese words (in Vietnamese alphabetical order), and gives English equivalents,

definitions and grammatical information for them; it is useful to the student of Vietnamese or English.

Bilingual dictionaries are either one-way or two-way. One-way bilingual dictionaries contain two lists of words: a two-way Vietnamese-English, English-Vietnamese dictionary has a list of Vietnamese words with English definitions, and a list of English words with Vietnamese definitions. (If the dictionary is at all extensive, the lists of words will be in two volumes, for reasons having to do with portability.) The title of a dictionary will ordinarily indicate whether it is one- or two-way, and which way it goes: a Vietnamese-English dictionary has a Vietnamese word list with English definitions, an English-Vietnamese dictionary has an English word list with Vietnamese definitions, and a Vietnamese-English, English-Vietnamese dictionary has both. The preface and explanatory notes of a dictionary will be in the same language as the definitions.

Problems with bilingual dictionaries

A bilingual dictionary differs from a monolingual dictionary in that in a bilingual dictionary, equivalents are given whenever possible. In a monolingual dictionary, for example, the word dog is defined ("...common domestic animal...a friend of man, of which there are many breeds..."); in an English-Vietnamese bilingual dictionary, however, the Vietnamese equivalent of dog, i.e. chó, is given, with nothing about domestic animals mentioned at all. In many cases, this is all that is necessary; the Vietnamese learner of English already knows what a chó is, so when he looks up the word dog, being told that it is a chó is fine for his purposes. Likewise, if the Vietnamese learner of English wants to find out what the English word for chó is, his Vietnamese-English bilingual dictionary will tell him that it is dog, and he can proceed with whatever he was saying.

Words like dog which translate fairly straightforwardly across languages are for the most part nouns and verbs denoting common objects and actions; as long as the language learner restricts himself to talking about mundane items and activities his bilingual dictionary will not lead him astray. Even on this level, however, problems can arise.

The most obvious problem stems from the fact that in every language words have multiple meanings. The best a bilingual dictionary can do is to list the equivalents for these multiple meanings, usually with the most frequently occurring meanings ordered before the less frequently occurring ones. The dictionary user must depend on the situation to supply him with enough clues to enable him to choose the right equivalent, and very often the situation doesn't. In one English-Vietnamese dictionary, for example, dog is translated as chó, the Vietnamese equivalent for dog as we mentioned above; an alternative equivalent given is giá để cùi trong lò sưởi, which translates as "fireplace rack"; a third equivalent given is người đểu-giả, which translates as "unscrupulous person". (dog, in British English, can mean "fireplace rack" and "unscrupulous person", as well as "dog". The English half of this dictionary is British rather than American.) The Vietnamese learner of English, given the sentence "There's the dog," has only the situation to tell him which of the three equivalents is the right one. Conversely, the Vietnamese learner of English who looks up chó in a Vietnamese-English dictionary is given the English equivalents dog and unscrupulous person, and he has to choose between them. The Vietnamese is as much at a loss deciding between dog and unscrupulous person as the American is who is deciding between chó, giá để cùi trong lò sưởi, and người đểu-giả.

Often these decisions are arbitrary ones, and the results are the sorts of "fractured

English" like I'd like someone book, we need it in the English program the present. (There are countless examples of "fractured Vietnamese" and "fractured Cambodian" as well.) The only way for, say, a Vietnamese to guard against mistakes of this sort is to look up a word first in a Vietnamese-English dictionary, and then look up each of the alternative equivalents in an English-Vietnamese dictionary to double-check its meaning. All of which is tedious and time-consuming to the point of being counter-productive.

Another unavoidable problem in using a bilingual dictionary is that very often there is no exact equivalent in one language for a word in the other, and the dictionary has to list a definition. In English, for example, there is no direct equivalent for the word cái, which functions grammatically like the word piece in a piece of cake. One of the Vietnamese-English dictionaries defines it as "word denoting inanimate object"; a Vietnamese refugee inexperienced in the ways of dictionaries might well translate the phrase một cái quần -- which means "pair of pants" -- as "one word denoting inanimate object trousers"!

The most obvious difficulty with using dictionaries is that there is more to communicating in a language than getting the words right. The following excerpt from a letter in the National Indochinese Clearinghouse files demonstrates this: "I'm is refugees from Vietnam please help me gives somes books..."; the author clearly intended to say "please help me by giving me some books", but we were able to figure this out only because he couldn't have meant anything else. Although all the words in this sentence are all right, the grammatical trappings which indicate the relationships among the words are either lacking or in the wrong place, and as a consequence the sentence doesn't say what it means. Learning where the grammatical trappings of a sentence should go is something

that a dictionary can't teach; in other words, a dictionary is not a substitute for a language class.

Choosing a dictionary

Unfortunately, really excellent bilingual dictionaries simply don't exist, except for languages like German-English and French-English, where there has been sufficient interaction between the countries speaking the languages to warrant the expense of the extensive research necessary to produce a good bilingual dictionary. Nonetheless, an intelligent user can get something out of even a very poor-quality dictionary, if he is aware of its limitations. As we mentioned before, words for common, ordinary things and actions are likely to have direct equivalents in both languages; these are the items the newly-arrived refugee will be looking up, and they are also the ones most successfully dealt with in a bilingual dictionary.

The psychological value of simply having a dictionary in one's hands should not be discounted, especially with highly educated refugees. Often, a dictionary serves -- like the "courage medicine" the Wizard of Oz gave the Cowardly Lion -- not so much to provide knowledge that wasn't there, but to provide the confidence to use the knowledge.

In any event, the refugee should be encouraged to switch from a bilingual dictionary to a monolingual dictionary as soon as possible, not only because it's better for his English, but also because there is such a wide range of excellent monolingual dictionaries, he can pick one exactly suited to his age and interests.

To bridge the gap between a bilingual dictionary and a monolingual dictionary designed for native speakers of English, the refugee should be given a monolingual

English dictionary especially designed for those who are learning English as a Foreign Language. The refugee who arrives in the United States able to read and write English pretty well can use one of these dictionaries from the start and, if he learns to use it to its fullest potential, he will appreciate the wealth of information it contains--not just on words, their definitions and grammatical characteristics, but also in areas problematic to foreigners, such as abbreviations, affixes, weights, measures, common first names, country names, and so on.

1. NGUYỄN ĐÌNH HÒA. Vietnamese-English Dictionary. Rutland, Vt.: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1966. $8.50.

   A simple and concise dictionary intended for use by the English-speaking student of Vietnamese. One-way only, it does not have definitions from English to Vietnamese. Guide to Vietnamese pronunciation is included. Approximately 27,000 entries.

   A revised and enlarged edition (approx. 43,000 entries) is available from the Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, IL 62901, at $15.00. (618) 453-2281.

2. LÊ BÁ KÔNG. Standard Pronouncing English-Vietnamese Dictionary (Tự-Điển Tiêu-Chuẩn Anh-Việt). Houston, Texas: Zieleks Publishing Co., 1975. 494 pp. $5.95.

   Approximately 12,000 entries. A new, revised and enlarged edition of the dictionary which has been in circulation in the U.S. Provides guides to Vietnamese pronunciation and tones, and an outline of Vietnamese grammar for the benefit of the English-speaking student of Vietnamese.

3. LÊ BÁ KÔNG and LÊ BÁ KHANH. Standard Pronouncing Vietnamese-English Dictionary (Tự-Điển Tiêu-Chuẩn Việt-Anh). Houston, Texas: Zieleks Publishing Co., 1975. 400 pp. $5.45.

   A new, revised and enlarged edition of the dictionary in circulation in the U.S., intended for the English speaker. One-way only, does not contain English-Vietnamese section. Approximately 9,000 entries.

4. LÊ BÁ KÔNG and LÊ BÁ KHANH. Standard Pronouncing English-Vietnamese/Vietnamese-English Dictionary. Houston, Texas: Zieleks Publishing Co., 1975. 900 pp, hard cover. $16.50.

   This dictionary is a combination of the Standard Pronouncing English-Vietnamese Dictionary and the Standard Pronouncing Vietnamese-English Dictionary, mentioned above, presented as one volume. Includes English pronunciation guides for the benefit of the Vietnamese speaker. Approximately 20,000 entries.

5. LÊ BÁ KÔNG. Vietnamese-English Conversational Dictionary (Tự-Điển Đàm-Thoại Việt-Anh). Houston, Texas: Zieleks Publishing Co., 1975. 414 pp. $4.45.

Vietnamese-English only, this volume defines frequently-encountered words and phrases in Vietnamese; definitions include examples of use. Also includes pronunciation and English grammar guides to irregular verbs, affixes, pronouns, interrogatories, etc. Approximately 6,000 entries.

6. NGUYỄN VĂN KHÔN. Usual Vietnamese-English/English-Vietnamese Dictionary (Việt-Anh Anh-Việt Tự-Điển Thông-Dụng). Fort Lewis, Wa: Pacific Northwest Trading Co., 1975. 1616 pp. $14.95.

A reprint of a two-way dictionary originally published by Khai-Trí in Saigon. Includes pronunciation guides for both Vietnamese and English (British); does not provide guide to phonetic symbols used. Approximately 56,000 entries.

7. Cambodian-English Glossary. Washington, DC: Inter-Agency Task Force, 1975. Free of charge. Available through December 31, 1975 unless reprinted.

A two-way glossary providing brief translation equivalents, without detail or pronunciation guides. Utilizes both Cambodian and English alphabets, so a familiarity with both is necessary. The Glossary was designed to be used with specific Cambodian/English material, so equivalents are at times unavoidably misleading. Approximately 20,000 entries.

8. KERR, Allen D. Lao-English Dictionary. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press in association with Consortium Press, 1972. 2 vols., $42.00.

An extensive, updated one-way dictionary, containing about 25,000 entries. Presentation of Lao is in the roman alphabet; tones are indicated by means of a simple and readily understandable system, with a minimum of phonetic symbols.

9. MARCUS, Russell. English-Lao, Lao-English Dictionary. Rutland, Vt.: C.E. Tuttle Co., 1971. 416 pp. $5.50.

Two-way dictionary. English-Lao section contains 5,000 entries especially selected for the use of the foreigner. Uses similar phonetic symbols as described above for Kerr dictionary. The Lao-English section also is a carefully selected list. Includes a section on the rules for alphabetizing Lao words and notes about the language, including consonant-vowel structure, pronunciation, tone marks, and punctuation. This volume is currently out of print; reprint pending. May still be available in some bookstores.

10. HORNBY, A.S. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, New Edition. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974. $8.95. Hard cover.

Universally used and respected dictionary for ESL students. Carefully designed to meet the needs of the ESL student, it includes a lengthy introduction which explains how to use the dictionary, an extremely practical, useful guide to pronunciation, appendices of such aspects of English as irregular verbs, affixes, and geographical names, and attention throughout to providing examples and contextual information, which all combine with other features to make the dictionary the most useful work available to the student.

11. SHAW, John R. and Janet Shaw. The Horizon Ladder Dictionary of the English Language. 2nd edition. New York: New American Library, 1970. $.95.

Intended for adult students of ESL. Special sections (in English) on English grammar, place names, and common abbreviations. Illustrative sentences clarify definitions. Entries include the 5,000 most frequently-occurring English words.

PUBLISHERS' ADDRESSES

1. Consortium Press, 1 West Deer Park Drive, Gaithersburg MD 20760. (301) 977-4440.

2. Inter-Agency Task Force, Office of Special Projects, 1717 K St, NW, Rm 820, Washington DC 20006. (202) 254-8283.

3. New American Library, 1301 Avenue of the Americas, New York NY 10019. (212) 956-3800.

4. Oxford University Press, 1600 Pollitt Drive, Fairlawn NJ 07410. (212) 564-6680.

5. Pacific Northwest Trading Co., Inc., P.O. Box 33184, Fort Lewis WA 98433. (206) 964-4517. East Coast: Vietnamese Pub. Co., Inc., P.O. Box 1251, Secaucus NJ 07094. (201) 863-8248.

6. Charles E. Tuttle Co., P.O. Box 470, Rutland VT 05701. (802) 773-8930.

7. Zieleks Publishing Co., 5000 Calhoun Rd., #76, Houston TX 77004. (713) 741-5594.

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